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## GLOBAL DIMENSIONS IN SERVICE LEARNING: A COLLABORATIVE GRANT-WRITING PROJECT

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Much has been written regarding the need to prepare American college and university students for global citizenship. In 1995, the American Council on Education's International Commission on International Education emphasized the need for colleges and universities to become institutions without boundaries in order to successfully prepare students for the new global environment of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (American Council on Education, 1995). Higher education faces many challenges in making this transformation. Green and Olson (2003) stated that the internationalization of college and university campuses requires new pedagogies that encourage interdisciplinary and integrative learning and that allow students to interact with the subject matter and apply it to things that matter.

Service learning has been used extensively over the past decade to support student involvement in their local communities. Service learning is a form of experiential education aimed at enriching student learning of course material. The term *service learning* was first coined in 1969 by members of Southern Regional Education Board who described it as "the accomplishment of tasks that meet genuine human needs in combination with conscious educational growth" (Stanton, Giles, & Cruz, 1999). Service learning has developed in part in response to a reform movement that questioned the passive, didactic process of postsecondary teaching and learning and the need to promote awareness of community issues and social responsibility (Stanton, 1990). A distinguishing feature of service learning is its reciprocal and balanced emphasis on both student learning and community service. Objectives are co-determined with community partners and are linked to meaningful and needed outcomes for both students and communities. Class lectures and discussion, assigned readings, independent research, and reflection activities inform the student projects and also provide advanced learning opportunities. As a consequence, the application of academic content to real-life situations is enhanced and student comprehension of social issues is deepened.

Strong potential exists for students to engage in international service learning opportunities while remaining on their own campuses. Philson (1998) pointed to the natural union of international education and information technologies, given the ability of the latter to transcend both space and time. He argued that the new and readily accessible information technologies of today provide educators with new opportunities for collaboration with international colleagues and access to resources as never before. Advances in digital communication bring the capacity to enlarge the scope of service learning opportunities for students from local communities to the global arena. Linkages with international community partners allow students to see the possibilities for contribution beyond their local communities and connect them with their roles as global citizens.

### **DESCRIPTION OF AN INNOVATIVE SERVICE LEARNING COLLABORATION**

A service learning model with a global focus was implemented at Colorado State University to assist a South African non-profit organization in enhancing their music education program in the township of Soweto, while at the same time advancing the international perspectives of American students in a senior capstone course on program development and grant writing. In partnership with The Orchestra Company, located in Johannesburg, South Africa, American undergraduate seminar students prepared a grant proposal addressing music education needs of Soweto youth.

Service learning has been utilized for over a decade in the senior capstone course required of all Human Development and Family Studies majors at Colorado State University. A key focus of the course is on developing grant-writing skills. Small groups (typically composed of three to five students) are linked with local community agencies to prepare grant proposals that can be used to advance the priorities of the organization. The option of a global aspect to this capstone course was a natural extension of previous efforts by the instructor to make the course more relevant and meaningful and to further develop a sense of global engagement and service commitment among students. The addition of a global option (in this instance a non-profit organization in South Africa) gave students the opportunity to expand their view of "community" and to experience a connection with the wider world. Since each group orally presented their projects at the end of the term, all 22 students in the class were exposed to this global perspective.

The focus of the grant proposal was on the enhancement and expansion of the EYETHU Soweto Music Project sponsored by The Orchestra Company. The Orchestra Company was formed in January 1998 after provincial subsidies were withdrawn from music programs in Gauteng province. This organization has developed a variety of projects encompassing all aspects of youth music. Started in 1999, EYETHU (meaning “ours”) currently provides instrumental and music literacy instruction to approximately 100 children from 14 Soweto primary and high schools. The aim is to give access to formal music education, previously unavailable to children in Soweto. The project promotes and develops programs for both students and educators, offering the opportunity for meaningful musical experiences and expression. EYETHU was developed as a direct response to requests by schools for instrumental instruction, music theory, and teacher training. Through its teacher-training component, EYETHU can potentially reach hundreds of Soweto children (a more detailed description of this program is available at [www.orchestracompany.co.za](http://www.orchestracompany.co.za)).

During the years of apartheid in South Africa, education funds were given to educate White students at the expense of Black schools and townships. Furthermore, the educational system was designed to isolate Black Africans from the higher quality education White students were receiving. Decades of the so-called “gutter” education for Black South Africans left an apartheid legacy that the government is now attempting to address (Cross, Mungadi, & Rouhani, 2002; Gilmour, Soudien, & Donald, 2000; Van Zyl, 1997). The EYETHU Soweto Music project aims to redress past inequities whereby township children were denied the benefits of music education. The township of Soweto played a pivotal role in the struggle against apartheid. A number of Soweto school children were killed in 1976 during a rally held in protest against their inferior education and the language of instruction. The images of this much-publicized event resulted in outrage from the world community and brought international condemnation of the apartheid government.

### **PROGRAM BENEFITS FOR SOUTH AFRICAN YOUTH**

Within South Africa the argument has been made that education in the arts, and the opportunity to learn and excel, must become increasingly available to all communities on an equitable basis (Ministry of Education, 2001). The National Curriculum Statement has in fact now mandated arts and culture as a learning area within the general education and training curriculum. This learning area covers classical/traditional arts and also gives equal emphasis to innovative, emergent arts to develop original and con-

temporary artistic expression. In addition to giving youth the means to express themselves creatively, the arts provide an avenue for communication that transcends language, which is particularly important in a country like South Africa where multiple languages are spoken. The arts can also lead to the skills associated with working effectively with others, an important learning outcome as delineated in the South African Qualifications Authority. Extra-curricular arts opportunities can reinforce this aspect of the school curriculum and be an important source of self-esteem for developing youth and a source of pride for the local community. The importance of music in the lives of South African youth is underscored in the following quote by Nelson Mandela: *"It is through music that we express our deepest emotions, the joys and sorrows of our people - and our deepest beliefs."*

## **LEARNING PROCESS AND OUTCOMES FOR AMERICAN STUDENTS**

The educational objectives of the service learning project for participating students were as follows:

- To acquire program development skills in an international context through a collaborative grant-writing project.
- To acquire proposal writing skills and familiarity with potential funders for youth projects in South Africa.
- To gain skill in locating and integrating professional sources of information related to music education in South Africa, recent trends in national education programs and policies, diversity of cultural traditions and customs, and the role of non-profit organizations in promoting youth programs.
- To acquire an understanding of political, social, and economic factors of relevance to the focus of the collaborative grant-writing project and its target population in South Africa.
- To gain perspective on ways in which the unique history of a particular community can affect the need and acceptance of music education programs.
- To gain experience in designing an appropriate and culturally-relevant evaluation plan for assessing project outcomes.
- To gain skills for working collaboratively through a service learning partnership with a South African non-governmental organization.

Students in the targeted course typically select a topic (and corresponding non-profit organization) for the required grant proposal from a range of available options, and then they are organized into small grant-writing groups. Thus students choosing the international service learning

opportunity clearly desired a global dimension to their seminar experience even though most had very limited international experience.

A premise of service learning is that learning occurs within a community, through interactions with other students and community partners. The social context of learning is increasingly recognized as important, particularly when student actions and outcomes are needed and valued by others (Miller & Scott, 2002). Members of each student grant-writing team depended on each other for successful completion of the service learning assignment, and the participating non-profit organization depended on the student group for a high quality grant proposal with potential for actual submission to a funding agency. The designated organizational contact at The Orchestra Company played a key role in the success of the project by providing current information to the instructor and students on the partner organization (structure and personnel), recent activities, and accomplishments as well as specifying priorities/objectives for new and expanded programs. Students had periodic opportunities to ask for clarification or elaboration from this individual via e-mail. The course instructor was responsible for directing students to academic resources relevant to the service-learning activity. By the end of the course, the students completed a five-page funding proposal that was transmitted both electronically and in hard copy to The Orchestra Company.

Prior agreement was obtained from the participating students for The Orchestra Company to use all or parts of their completed proposal for submission to an actual funder, but the organization had no obligation to do so. While undergraduate students are not professional grant writers, as a result of this project they were able to prepare a professional document infused with fresh ideas and incorporating recent research to enhance empirically-based practice with attention to cultural issues.

## **SERVICE LEARNING AS PEDAGOGY: ENHANCING THE EXPERIENCE**

### ***Structured Reflection***

Opportunity for reflection is a critical aspect of effective service learning and distinguishes it from other forms of experiential education (Zlotkowski, 1999). To establish a reflective classroom environment in which relevant issues are further pondered and explored, structured reflection was promoted through analytic papers and discussion. This reflection was prompted by questions intended to stimulate deeper thinking about the project, how it fit into the larger scheme of emerging needs of youth with-

in a new democracy, its contribution to current community and national education initiatives, and the strengths and challenges inherent in a collaborative, cross-cultural grant-writing project. Students were encouraged to examine their own beliefs, values, and stereotypes and to think about how these might interfere with their own learning as well as their ability to contribute to this collaborative grant-writing project. They were also asked to consider their limitations for contributing to the project and aspects of their background and experience that would influence their approach, perceptions, and interpretations. The students were challenged to design a project that would take into account the relevant stakeholders, the factors that would influence acceptance and support for this project in the local community, and the processes and elements that would ensure continued community involvement and support.

### ***Content Knowledge Acquisition***

For successful implementation of a service-learning project, considerable background reading is necessary to understand the broader context in which the project is embedded. Jane Kendall (1990) stated that effective service-learning programs are explicitly structured to promote learning about larger issues. This learning includes a deeper understanding of the historical, sociological, cultural, economic, and political contexts of the human needs or issues being addressed through the service-learning activity.

In preparation for engaging in the collaborative grant-writing project, each seminar student wrote a research paper on a specific topic related to the proposed program. Students in each group coordinated with each other (with the instructor's guidance) to avoid duplication and to ensure coverage of essential topics. Students were expected to conduct extensive literature reviews on their chosen topics, and the instructor directed them to key reference documents and library materials. Specific topics addressed included challenges for South African youth in a new democracy, historical perspectives on education in South Africa (with an emphasis on Bantu education), current educational policies and practices, the role of music in South African cultures, and the function of the arts in intervention programs. Particular emphasis was placed on the role of music education in the current South African school system, particularly with regard to the recent focus on outcomes-based education. Having spent a month in South Africa during the previous year on a Fulbright Group Seminar Abroad program, the instructor collected and provided students with access to recent government reports and other materials published in South Africa as well as current websites related to educational issues in the country.



### ***Skill Development***

Though this service-learning activity, students gained experience in writing a project proposal in collaboration with an international non-profit organization. Elements of successful grant writing were presented through class lectures, and examples of successful grant proposals were provided as models. The completed proposal submitted by students included the following elements: agency information, target population, statement of need for the proposed program, goals and objectives, and a detailed description of program activities, timeline, and evaluation plan. Due to the complexity of budget issues in an international context, students were not required to develop a detailed budget as would typically be the case. The contact for the partner organization provided a target range for the total program budget so that a grant proposal could be developed that was appropriate in size and scope.

### **SUCCESSFUL IMPLICATION: CRITICAL ASPECTS**

Several factors contributed to the successful implementation and effectiveness of this cross-cultural project. The instructor had taught the capstone seminar many times, had extensive experience in international education, and had recently visited South Africa and The Orchestra Company program in Soweto. All of these factors contributed significantly to her ability to effectively mentor students in the class. Also, the instructor had identified a key contact in the partner organization, and this individual was eager to be a resource for the collaborative grant-writing project. There was joint agreement on the focus of the proposal and the purpose of the service-learning activity. Further, respective roles and responsibilities were clarified during the planning stage prior to the start of the course. This advance planning and preparation made the international service-learning activity a viable option for students in the course and more comparable to the work done locally by other students in the class.

Hey (2000) emphasized the importance of “humanizing” the problem for students to encourage engagement and active learning, and personal photographs and stories can be a very effective way of helping students connect with a situation and culture that is foreign to them. Early in the course, the instructor shared digitized photos as well as concrete examples of Soweto children and youth from her first-hand observations and experiences. One student in the class wrote: *“I think that it is hard to have any sort of understanding or real empathy towards other people unless you see and really feel what they are going through or need. Being part of a team and really studying the program and the history of the Soweto people helped; however, I think it*



*was the pictures and stories of children that flipped a switch in my mind, allowing me to open my heart and let the needs of the individuals in, leaving behind the concept of the nameless group."*

The enthusiasm and commitment to the project among group members were also critical factors. All shared a strong passion for education, music, and working with children. Several of the students planned to become teachers and almost all were skilled in some area of the arts (i.e., playing a musical instrument, performing in musical productions). The unique skills, knowledge, and personal experiences each student brought to the class contributed to a successful process and outcome for the group as a whole.

## **INSTRUCTIONAL CHALLENGES**

The course was successful in that students felt like they learned a tremendous amount about another culture, developed grant-writing skills, and gained new insights while producing a grant proposal that could be used by a non-profit organization in South Africa. Nonetheless, the instructor identified several shortcomings in her assessment of this curriculum project. First of all, it was definitely a challenge to accomplish all the aims of a capstone course combined with the integration of a strong cross-cultural component. The course was very fast paced and task oriented. To maximize the effectiveness of this service-learning experience, students needed more time to consider issues (appropriateness, who really benefits, questions of sustainability) associated with the model of individuals from a Western society applying technical skills to address local issues in a South African community. Ideally, the students would be able to enroll in a two-course sequence that would allow a second semester for additional reflection on questions such as: To what extent can education and/or intervention models from the United States be effectively implemented in a South African context? Students would clearly have benefited from taking a step back and reviewing their own proposals after some time had elapsed to determine biases and assumptions inherent in the document they had created.

From the instructor's vantage point, it was clear that students understandably used their own "western education" frame of reference when designing a music education program for Soweto youth. Instead of using a general approach that would have allowed the non-profit organization to customize the proposal to meet their individual needs, the students erred on the side of detail and specificity rather than flexibility. While they gained an appreciation of cultural differences and needs, the demands of the course did not allow sufficient time to perceive and experience the nu-

ances that are part of effective cross-cultural work.

Fung (1998) made the point that there are both universals and non-universals of music and that the universality should not be overstated. The role of music in the history of Soweto is unique and cannot be fully grasped or appreciated by undergraduate students in such a limited time frame. Deeper exploration of questions such as the following would have moved the students beyond a superficial level of understanding: What role has music played historically in terms of expression of political oppression, social issues, and group identity in Soweto? What transitions, if any, have occurred in the music created and played in this new democracy? Based on available research, what potential does music have as an educational and therapeutic tool to help address emerging issues such as HIV/AIDS among South African youth?

Thinking more about the broader context would also have enhanced the experience (for example, learning more about the role that non-governmental organizations play in South Africa and how these organizations are typically funded as well as the ways these programs interface with schools, governmental agencies, and other entities). Perspective-taking from the vantage point of the non-profit entity would have allowed students to enter the mind-set of the staff member they were working with (Hey, 2000), but this sharpened "lens" is usually only developed through repeated interactions over time. Thus collaboration at a distance and within the context of one particular course does have distinct limitations.

More opportunities were also needed for students to reflect on their own growth process and what they learned about themselves; for example, the assumptions they made when starting this service-learning project and the ways they were challenged to think differently. Judging from informal comments made by students, it is possible that several additional outcomes will result from their participation in this service-learning project such as shifts in career direction or greater involvement in international work. Emphasis is usually given to short-term objectives when formally assessing the outcomes of international education projects with inadequate attention given to longer-term consequences. Unfortunately, all students in the course were seniors and graduating; thus, only limited opportunity for systematic follow-up was possible.

## CONCLUSION

In the service-learning project described in this article, students in a senior grant-writing course in the human services had the opportunity to work on real-life issues affecting youth in a foreign country. The experi-

ence of engaging in service learning having global dimensions made their academic learning relevant while simultaneously enhancing their grant-writing skills, expanding their knowledge of contemporary issues affecting South African youth, gaining experience with culturally-relevant program planning and evaluation, and examining the linkages between educational and community intervention in a South African context. Participating students unanimously reported a variety of positive outcomes in terms of academic learning, skill development, and increased awareness of international issues. The course was also appropriate as a senior capstone experience in terms of rigor and the expectation of synthesis, integration, and application of the academic content learned in their major. The following statement by a student illustrates the integrative nature of the learning outcomes: *"The most meaningful learning experience for me was realizing that all my hard work paid off. I was able to use skills developed over the past four years to positively benefit strangers half-way around the world. What could be more rewarding than that?"*

As a result of this structured service-learning experience, student perceptions changed as well. One student shared that she initially thought her group might be at a disadvantage by selecting an international project due to the inherent challenges but concluded at the end of the class that she valued the expanded learning involved and the opportunity to *"close the geographical barrier."* Another student commented, *"Distance really is no divider when a basic understanding is reached and a passion is shared to fulfill a need."*

The instructor plans to maintain contact with South African colleagues to assess longer-term outcomes of the collaboration and to determine specific ways that the partnership can be expanded for increased benefit to all stakeholders. It is anticipated that a future stage might involve South African college/university students so that grant-writing skills can be developed among those local youth aspiring to work with non-profit organizations such as The Orchestra Company.

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